

Letter from Taizé

**YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING**
28 December - 1 January
Taizé
2000/2001
Barcelona

PROCESSED

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THE EUROPEAN MEETING IN BARCELONA

**"We always wanted
to open our home"** Throughout
the summer in

Taizé, young people from Barcelona and the surrounding region shared with others the joy of preparing the upcoming European meeting at home, and their hopes for their city or their parish.

Why and how can we offer hospitality to others? What role will praying together have? What is the most important thing we want to communicate to those who come from so far away? These questions are dealt with in the following letters:

A young mother is preparing to welcome participants to her home: "The city of Barcelona is used to welcoming people from all over; it is a city of commerce and of congresses. For the Olympic Games, access to and in the city was much improved. Nonetheless, the presence of so many young people here from every country will be an eloquent witness. I have high hopes, especially for the life of the Church. In our parishes, we need the vitality that young adults from throughout Europe can bring. It will be a big help to see these young people praying, reflecting, sharing their questions about faith. For our young family, for our children, it will be good to offer hospitality to people from other countries, to have the experience of understanding one another in spite of differences, and we hope that they too will realize that they can receive a lot when they open themselves to others. Beyond the experience of tolerance, I think that this effort of opening ourselves and communicating is, in the final analysis, the foundation on which every Christian community is built. We have always wanted to open our home, with simplicity. Thanks to those who will come from far away, we are going to learn how to do this."

It is easy for young people from dif-

ferent parts of Spain to come to Barcelona, and many of them will help with the welcome: "In Spain, we are so different from one another, more because of our mentalities than because of the questions we ask. This year we will go to the European meeting as neighbours, and we are happy that we can share the gifts of our different regions with those who come—who knows?—from Russia or Bulgaria, from the other end of Europe. My experience is that during each European meeting everything comes together, the prayer and the welcome, and something can change in each person. The idea is not to convince anybody, but rather to propose another way of life. That is what helped me to rediscover Christianity as an openness that enables us to leave behind discouragement and a closed outlook. I come from Madrid, but I see Barcelona as a city in which this kind of openness can be lived out. When people begin to trust, they can give the best of themselves, and what strikes me about many of the inhabitants of Barcelona is their generosity and their commitment."

Prayer and life-commitment

The European meeting will be a unique moment for sharing the searching and the commitment of each participant, in small or large groups as well as through a great many individual contacts: "For me," said a young father who works for a Church relief organi-

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The Summer in Taizé

During the summer months, from June to October, welcoming large numbers of visitors to the hill of Taizé did not cease for a single day.

"What astonishes me," writes a young doctor, "is to see how silence and a radiant joy in living go together. In the silence, it's as if all the noise of the world was put aside. And even when many different languages ring out during the prayer or in the discussion groups, even when Mexicans and Span-

ish compete by dancing to the sound of a guitar, the silence remains. Everything is still peaceful, because everything is in its place."

The diversity of languages

This year, perhaps more than other years, this diversity of languages was audible: Balts or Scandinavians, Slavs or Mediterraneans, Westerners or Easterners, Africans or Asians. In this midst of this diversity, and perhaps on account of it, it seemed as if an invisible fabric was being woven out of a host of tiny threads created from one week to the next. When people consent to allow their lives to touch the lives of others, when each person enters into a sharing of their discoveries and their questions, a multicolored fabric comes into being which can give solidity to all.

For several years now, a great effort has been made so that young people from different continents can take part in the meetings. In general they stay for three months. They can witness to the dynamism of their church life at home during the workshops each day or in the Saturday afternoon forum. This year, there were more Africans than usual. They often shared their experience. Each week they led a workshop where they welcomed everybody through dances and songs, before expressing it in words.

The presence of young Orthodox Christians was more visible than ever. Some weeks, 20% of all the young adults present were Orthodox—Bulgarians, Romanians, Russian, Serbs, Ukrainians. Approximately sixty young Russians stayed for several weeks to help with the welcome, among them twenty from Novosibirsk. The presence of young people from the former Yugoslavia had a big impact. Among others there was a Serbian choir that sang every evening at the end of the prayer. In August, fifty young Orthodox Christians from Kosovo came, who live at present in Belgrade. The Orthodox priest who brought them spoke in the church:

"For forty years now, the Taizé Community has been active in Serbia. Brothers or young people sent by Taizé came to us in the 1960s and 1970s and communicated to us your concern with the inner life. Brother Roger spoke words about the beauty of prayer which entered our hearts. That is why our Patriarch wanted young people from the Serbian Orthodox Church to take part in these meetings. When we arrived we asked ourselves: are we in France? in Spain? in Portugal? in Belgium? in England? in Germany? Or could we be in Africa? We also could have thought that we were in Russia when we entered this

church with icons, candles and such a prayerful atmosphere. Then we realized that we were all together here to learn to pray with the brothers of the community. It is a unique experience to spend this week in Taizé to share with one other, to love one another and to find this communion. We thank you for having welcomed us as brothers and sisters. We thank you for your love."

To support the reflection, every day brothers give introductions. There can be as many as seventeen groups at the same time, adapted to the age and the needs of the participants. To respond to the need to go deeper, one of the new elements this year was the variety of workshops offered at the end of every afternoon. Twenty or so topics were dealt with each week, going from biblical themes like the resurrection or forgiveness to the discovery of works of art or presentations on different countries. In addition there were reflections on the economy or on peace, and questions such as the meaning of suffering or how to discover God's call in my life.

The weeks before and after World Youth Day in Rome, many groups of young people from faraway lands passed through Taizé. Some groups included more than 100 participants: from the Philippines, India and Australia (with their bishops), as well as young people from Cape Verde, Canada and the United States, China, New Zealand, Ivory Coast, several countries from South America, Japan, Korea, Haiti, 450 young Flemish people from Belgium with their bishop, and so on.

In the middle of the summer, the Taizé Community took part in World Youth Day by holding prayers for three days in a church in the center of Rome, the one from which the way of the Cross started out on Friday evening—Santa Maria in Aracoeli. It is a beautiful basilica perched on the summit of the Capitoline Hill. It was decorated with orange fabric, icons and candles for the occasion. With limited means (a small choir, a few musical instruments, a group of young volunteers) ten brothers occupied it for three days, alternating the welcome of groups with times of prayer.

Week after week, the meetings in Taizé offer the possibility to share information about upcoming gatherings in other places. The Swedes are looking forward to the meeting to be held in Uppsala at the beginning of November. The peoples of Spain are overjoyed to invite all the Europeans to the meeting in Barcelona. Those in charge of youth ministry in El Salvador have come with the proposition for a meeting for the youth of Central America to which young Mexicans will also be invited: it will be held at Pentecost 2001. Other gatherings will soon be held in Brazil, in the Philippines, and in Senegal.

Helping others to recognize God's love

In the midst of all the sharing, even if many come to Taizé for the first time, the question of continuity once people have returned home keeps coming up. How can we communicate to others what we have discovered? How can we keep searching in daily life? Here for example is what Marion had to say:

I often find people astonished or even shocked when I explain that soon I am going to be working full-time in a parish. "I can understand that you believe in God," they tell me, "but there is no future in working for the Church!" I often hear these kinds of remarks, and I do not want to cover my ears or act as if the problems people, especially young people, have with the Church do not exist. For many years I did not give much importance to the Church for my faith; I did not feel there was a lot of faith being lived out in my parish. For a long time I tried to find people whose faith in God and in Christ made them happy.

During my first stay in Taizé, I saw how the brothers and the young people tried to live out the joyful message of Christ in simplicity and in love. I felt that I could be accepted just as I am. For the first time I realized that God loved me unconditionally. And I also discovered how important it was to share my faith with others. In communion with others we can support each other and find the courage for the choices we have to make. Jesus wanted above all to open the road of a communion for us.

When I returned home, like many others at first I was a bit sad. I no longer found what had given me joy and satisfied my desire for God. But thanks to the European meeting that was held in Munich shortly afterwards, and by helping to prepare that meeting in my parish, for the first time I got to know the people in my parish better. As we prepared the program together and looked for families to offer hospitality, the communion grew stronger. For me, it became clearer and clearer that what I had found in Taizé could be discovered everywhere that people try to live together in peace and love. This communion makes God accessible.

Through the meetings in Taizé and in Munich, I found more and more joy in my involvement in the parish. This led me to decide to live this joy of communicating the good news of Christ through my work. After a new course of studies in pastoral ministry, this autumn I began to work in a new parish. I see clearly everything there is to criticize about the Church, but I also know that, in spite of my weakness, I can help the joy of a communion to grow, and I can help make God's love be recognized by others.

zation, "the Taizé meetings are not only times to pray and deepen my relationship with God, alone and with others. They are also a time for me to ask myself this question: do I know how to translate my relationship with God into the choices I make in my day-to-day life? For this, I need to meet persons who have other kinds of commitments, other choices, and who help me in this way to take decisions in situations in which I feel I need to be involved. In each of the meetings in which I have participated, I dialogued with people who, as a result of their Christian faith, had made serious choices to work for a more human world."

Barcelona offers a great many different experiences, often related to community living: "For several years now, we have been living together as a small lay community in the district of Barceloneta. It is a working-class neighbourhood of fishermen located in the city centre, with the sea on all sides. We hope that the European meeting will enable the young people who live here but who have no reason to go to church to come together. At present we are working mainly in religious education and preparation for confirmation, and also in welcoming the homeless. In Barcelona, there are many places of hospitality organized by the parishes, where volunteers take turns offering shelter to those who have no place to go and helping them to find a

more long-term solution. At the heart of our community life is our prayer together twice a day, and one evening we have a prayer open to all. We have great hopes for the Church and for ourselves, hopes that are always renewed: that the Church might be close to the poorest, to those who have the greatest need to be convinced of God's love, and for us, that our daily prayer may make us able to be more attentive to those around us; they expect from us a depth of relationship that enables us to count on one another."

In the preparations for the European meeting, the life of the whole local Church is involved: "Many of us have already taken part in the previous European meeting in Barcelona, in 1985, and we saw how much that experience helped us to open ourselves to other realities in our local Church. Now, we also need to support one another. Many find it difficult to discover a place in the structures of the Church and look elsewhere for ways of helping others. There are many initiatives of mutual aid, both locally and with countries on other continents. The meeting should make more communication possible. Looking for "places of hope," and the times of sharing during the meeting itself, will give us new impetus. For me, another important continuity is that of prayer. We are fortunate to have a prayer each week in the town centre; it has been organized for the last twenty years by different generations of young people who have kept it up faithfully. And there

are others who offer a space of prayer open to all in their parishes."

Allowing barriers to fall

As an echo to this news from Barcelona, here is a letter from someone who is getting ready to travel to the European meeting: "When we invite people to come to Barcelona with us, we sometimes see that what is most important for them at first is the city that is going to welcome them. And it's true, people will not be disappointed; the city is very beautiful. But afterwards, they understand that what will have the most impact will be the welcome in the families and the meeting with other young adults. For those of us who have already experienced a week in Taizé or being welcomed for a meeting in our area of Vienna, opening up to people from other countries is natural. But I see how some people still have a reflex of fear: 'What will the others think of us?' I have also noticed that in our countries we have a tendency to turn inwards, to be afraid of foreigners, to set up a lot of obstacles to their coming to us. So the simple and festive experience of the meeting will allow barriers to fall. It is more difficult to explain in words what the times of prayer will be like. So we are proposing regular times of prayer and meeting for those who want to go to Barcelona, and our archbishop will come to pray with us in December."

YOUNG ADULT
EUROPEAN
MEETING
28 December - 1 January

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From 28th December 2000 to 1st January 2001, tens of thousands of young adults from Europe and the whole world will be welcomed in the city of Barcelona. This next stage in the "Pilgrimage of Trust on Earth" will be the twenty-third Young Adult European Meeting organised by the Taizé Community.

The European Meeting will be organised around prayers that will be held every midday and evening in large halls at the centre of the city. In the afternoons, there will be a choice of different workshops. In the mornings, after the prayer in the parishes, there will be time for sharing in small groups together with people who have taken on commitments locally.

In taking part in the pilgrimage to Barcelona from other parts of Europe and even further afield, we are

expressing our hope that the young people of Spain will bring their specific contribution to deepening the sense of communion and the sharing between different peoples.

The region of Barcelona has a rich tradition of faith and a distinctive culture. But as an international port city linking Europe to other continents it has also acquired an openness. So it will be a rich setting for a meeting which aims to encourage sharing and communion between people who have very different languages and cultures!

Some questions to help prepare for Barcelona:

- What motivates me to set out towards other Christians who are far away?
- The pilgrimage to Barcelona calls for an inner attitude of openness and attentiveness to others. How can I begin by opening myself to those who need me here and now?
- Can I take an occasional time of silence to review my life, to pray simply while listening to God, and to see what consequences there are in my daily life?

- Do I know others who would be keen to join in this "pilgrimage of trust" as a way of discovering a deeper community in the Church?
- The starting-point of the pilgrimage is the local community. How can I look for ways of maintaining and deepening links with different groups and local Christian communities?

Practical Details

Arrival: Thursday morning, 28th December 2000 between 7am and 12 noon.

Departure: Monday afternoon (after 4pm), 1st January 2000.

Accommodation: either with families or in school and church halls. It is essential to bring a camping mat, sleeping bag and warm clothes.

General programme for 17-29 year olds

Participants will be welcomed by families and local church communities throughout the city and surrounding region. Morning prayer each day will be in one of the churches of the neighbourhood where you are staying. Afterwards, meetings in small groups with other participants and with local people. At midday and evening each day there will be prayers for all participants of

the meeting together. In the afternoon, workshops on various themes. It is also possible to spend the five days of the meeting in silence (separate accommodation).

Helpers/Choir: (This option is open only to young adults between the ages of 17 and 29.) Those who would like to help as group-leaders in parishes or team-leaders for practical tasks, or in the choir group, should, if possible, arrive on Tuesday 26th December, between 8am and 3pm. (It is not possible to arrive on 27th December). Some of these teams will also be open to participants who arrive on 28th December.

16 year olds: may come to the meeting only if accompanied by an adult over 21, with each adult accompanying no more than six 16 year olds. Arrival: 28th December (not before).

Adults over 30: The European Meeting is intended for young adults under 30. However a few adults over this age can also come, in particular if they are leading groups of young adults. We ask older adults (over 45) to consider sponsoring a young person to come from a church, chaplaincy or school in their area, instead of coming themselves. All adults over 30 participate in the main group, and arrive on 28th December (not before). If you cannot accept the same simple accommodation conditions as

Why do we pray to Jesus and not just to God?

Is the Holy Spirit an energy or a person?

The model of Christian prayer is Jesus' own prayer. When Jesus prayed he addressed his prayer to God alone, faithful to the commandment: "The Lord your God is the one you shall worship; him alone you shall serve" (Matt 4,10). His disciples did the same. Like all Jewish believers at that time they prayed to the Lord God, also calling him "our Father" as Jesus had told them to do.

Why then are so many of our Christian prayers addressed to Christ? The gospels tell us that people often came to Jesus to make a request. A father begged him to save his child who was seriously ill (Mark 5,23). A blind man cried out, "Have pity on me!" (Mark 10,47). In a boat tossed by the wind and the waves, the disciples shouted, "Lord, save us, we are lost!" These are requests made to a human being. The last example is a story that emphasizes the humanity of Jesus: he is sleeping and his disciples have to wake him up to ask for help! But it is also true that people address Jesus in exactly the same way that the ancient biblical prayers spoke to God: "Lord, save us!" People must have spontaneously spoken to Christ using the same words that were customarily used in prayers to God. But soon they would reflect more explicitly on this: if a similar prayer can be addressed both to God and to Jesus, must there not be an intimate communion uniting the two?

After Easter, "the prayer of the Church" still "rose up to God" (Acts 12,5). And the Church still offers prayers today, through Christ and the Holy Spirit, to "the Maker of heaven and earth." But the certainty that we can ask Jesus for something, that we can call upon him and pray to him, has remained. We find an early example in the Acts of the Apostles. While his enemies were stoning Stephen, he prayed: "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" and then: "Lord, do not hold this sin against them" (Acts 7,59-60). These two petitions could have been addressed to God. But the Lord invoked here is Jesus, for in a heavenly vision, Stephen saw him clothed in God's radiance, "standing at the right hand of God" (Acts 7,55-56). Because he is one with God, Christ hears our prayers.

If we pray to Christ and even if, following the apostle Thomas, we call him "our God" (John 20,28), this does not take anything away from the greatness of the one God. On the contrary, Jesus is Lord "to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2,9-11); his equality with God reveals this mystery: God is not solitude but a communion of love.

On Pentecost day, the Holy Spirit was manifested as a fire of enthusiasm. Overflowing with joy, the disciples of Jesus "proclaimed the marvelous deeds of God," and those who observed them were perplexed: "What is going on here?" (Acts 2,11-12). So the apostle Peter explained that it was the power of the Holy Spirit. "Raised to God's right hand," he said, "Jesus received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit, and what you see and hear is the outpouring of that Spirit" (Acts 2,33).

Speaking of the same gift of the Spirit, Saint John uses a different language: "The Angel showed me the river of Life, clear as crystal, rising from the throne of God and of the Lamb" (Revelation 22,1). The Lamb is Jesus who, having died on the cross, went to the Father. "The throne of God and of the Lamb" is the reign and the glory of the Father and the Son. From their communion in love the river of Life gushes forth, the Holy Spirit, and refreshes the world. The Spirit is God's constant presence and activity, giving "life, movement and being" (Acts 17,28) to everything.

The Holy Spirit is said to be "poured out" when it is compared to water: God makes the Spirit flow "like streams," like a blessing, the outpouring of the divine life (Isaiah 44,3). In other places, the Bible compares the Holy Spirit to wind, to a breath, and this is even easier since, in the biblical languages, it is one and the same word. God's Spirit is his creative power: "You send forth your breath and everything is created" (Psalm 104,30). In his conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus speaks of that elusive presence of God that takes human beings by surprise so that they can be born to freedom: "The wind (the Spirit) blows where it wishes, and you hear its voice, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with anyone born of the Spirit" (John 3,8).

Why then is the Holy Spirit thought of as a person, equal to God and to Christ? Before leaving his disciples, Jesus "spoke to them clearly and not using veiled language" (John 16,29). He dropped the images of wind and water and compared the Holy Spirit to himself: "I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Paraclete (advocate, defense, comfort)" (John 14,16). The Holy Spirit shares with Christ the fact of being sent by God. The Spirit is called "another Paraclete" with respect to Christ, who was the first Paraclete. The Spirit will be for all time what Jesus was for his followers on this earth. Radiance of God in the universe, life in all things, the Holy Spirit is not, however, an impersonal energy or a blind force. An age-old prayer of Pentecost calls the Spirit "Father of the poor," because he looks at us, listens to us, supports our trust.

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

5 SUN Mk 12:28-34 Jesus said: Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength. Love your neighbour as yourself. These are the two greatest commandments.

6 MON Dt 4:29-31 You will seek the Lord your God; you will find the Lord if you search for him with all your heart and all your soul.

7 TUE Ac 15:5-12 Peter said: God chose me so that the nations might hear from my lips the message of the Good News and believe. God makes no distinction between human beings.

8 WED Ps 10:14-18 You hear the desire of the humble Lord; you encourage them and listen to their cry.

9 THU 2 Tm 1:6-11 Paul writes to Timothy: Share in my sufferings for the Gospel, relying on the power of God who has saved us and called us to be holy.

10 FRI Is 42:10-17 The Lord says: I shall lead my people by a road that is unknown to them. I shall turn the darkness into light before them.

11 SAT Jm 5:7-11 James writes: Be patient; do not lose heart, for the Lord's coming will be soon.

4 SAT Ph 4:4-7 Do not let anything worry you, but in every situation, by prayer with thanksgiving, let God know your desires.

12 SUN Mk 12:41-44 Jesus saw a poor widow put two small coins into the temple treasury and, calling his disciples, he said, "In truth I tell you, this poor widow has put in more than all the others, for they all gave out of their wealth, but she has put in everything she possessed."

13 MON Zc 2:14 Sing and rejoice, my people, for I am coming to live among you, says the Lord.

14 TUE Lk 9:46-48 Jesus said: Anyone who welcomes a little child in my name welcomes me; and anyone who welcomes me, welcomes the one who sent me.

15 WED Ps 119:25-32 I run in the path of your will, O God, for you have set my heart free.

16 THU 2 Co 8:1-4 Paul writes of the first Christian communities: Throughout ordeals of hardship, their unfailing joy and extreme poverty overflowed in rich generosity.

17 FRI Is 43:18-21 God says: I have put water in the desert for my people to drink. The people I have formed for myself will sing my praises.

18 SAT Ac 5:17-33 God has raised Jesus from the dead to make him Saviour, and through him to change our hearts and grant forgiveness of sins.

19 SUN Mk 13:24-32 Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away.

20 MON Ph 3:7-14 Paul writes: Forgetting what is behind and straining towards what is ahead, I press on towards the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.

21 TUE Ac 26:1-23 Paul said: I have borne witness to great and small alike, saying that the Christ was to suffer and that, as the first to rise from the dead, he was to proclaim a light for all nations.

22 WED Ep 1:3-10 God has let us know the mystery of his good purpose: to bring all things together under Christ as head.

23 THU Jn 10:1-10 Jesus said: I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

24 FRI 2 Co 3:4-6 God has made us able to serve a new covenant, one which is not of written letters but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

25 SAT Jn 15:9-13 Jesus said: This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.

26 SUN Jn 18:33-37 Jesus said to Pilate: For this I was born, and for this I came into the world: to bear witness to the truth. Everyone who belongs to the truth listens to my voice.

27 MON Is 60:18-20 God says to his people: No longer will violence be heard of in your land. The sun will no more be your light by day, nor will the brightness of the moon shine on you, for the Lord will be your everlasting light, your God will be your glory.

28 TUE Col 1:9-14 God has rescued us from the rule of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have forgiveness.

29 WED 2 Co 3:16-18 Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

30 THU Mt 4:18-22 ST ANDREW Jesus saw Simon and his brother Andrew. They were casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. And he said to them, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of people." And at once they left their nets and followed him.

NOVEMBER

MEDITATING ON THE WORD

These short readings are those read, day by day, at community prayer in Taizé. The Bible reference given indicates a slightly longer passage.

3 SUN ADVENT
Lk 21:25-36
Jesus said: Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away. Be on the watch and pray at all times.

4 Mon
Is 49:13-15
Thus says the Lord: Does a woman forget her child at the breast, or fail to cherish her offspring? Even if she forgets, I will never forget you.

5 Tue
Is 61:1-3
The Lord sent me to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted and to proclaim freedom to those in captivity.

6 Wed
Mt 24:42-44
Jesus said to his disciples: Stand ready, because the Son of man is coming at an hour you do not expect.

7 Thu
Is 66:12-14
The Lord says: I am going to send peace to my people like a river. When you see this, your heart will rejoice.

8 Fri
Lk 1:26-38
Mary said to the angel: I am the Lord's servant, let it happen to me as you have said.

9 Sat
Ep 3:14-21
May God strengthen you in your inner being through the Spirit, so that Christ may live in your hearts through faith.

10 SUN
Lk 3:1-6
John the Baptist came as is written in the book of Isaiah: A voice of one who cries in the desert, "Prepare a way for the Lord, make straight his paths!"

11 Mon
Ps 130
My soul is waiting for the Lord, I rely on his promise; my soul relies on the Lord more than a night-watcher man on the coming of dawn.

12 Tue
Is 57:14-15
God says: My home is a high and holy place, but I am with the humble and contrite to revive their spirit.

13 Wed
Is 61:10-11
As the earth sends up its shoots and a garden lets its seeds sprout, so God will cause justice and praise to spring up.

14 Thu
Mt 28:16-20
Jesus, risen from the dead, said to his disciples: I am with you always, to the end of time.

15 Fri
Rm 15:1-6
May the God of perseverance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves following the example of Christ Jesus, so that with one heart and one voice you may glorify God.

16 Sat
Jn 16:32-33
Jesus said: In the world you will have hardship. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

17 SUN
Lk 3:10-18
John the Baptist said to the people: Anyone who has two tunics must share with whoever has none. And anyone with something to eat must do the same.

18 Mon
Dn 3:51-90
Bless the Lord, you who are holy and humble in heart, praise and glorify him forever! For God has rescued us from the hand of death.

19 Tue
Is 11:1-10
Isaiah said: God's Spirit will be upon the Messiah. He will not judge by appearance, but he will judge the weak with justice and give fair sentence for the humble in the land.

20 Wed
Is 65:17-18
The Lord says: See, I am going to create new heavens and a new earth. Be filled with rejoicing for ever, for I am creating my people to be gladness.

21 Thu
Rm 10:5-10
The Word of God is very near you, it is on your lips and in your heart.

22 Fri
Rm 12:1-13
Do not model yourselves on the pattern of this world, but let yourselves be transformed by the renewing of your mind so that you may discern the will of God.

23 Sat
2 Th 3:1-5
May the Lord direct your hearts into God's love and Christ's perseverance.

24 SUN
Lk 1:39-45
Elizabeth said to Mary: Blessed is she who believed that the promise of the Lord made her would be fulfilled.

25 Mon CHRISTMAS
The shepherds hurried to Bethlehem and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in the manger. When they saw the child they repeated what they had been told about him and then returned glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

26 Tue
Mt 10:17-22
St STEPHEN
Jesus said: When you are handed over, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. What you are to say will be given to you when the time comes, for it is not you who will be speaking but the Spirit of your Father will be speaking in you.

27 Wed
1 Jn 1:1-4
St JOHN
Life itself became visible, we saw it and testify to it. We proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was revealed to us.

28 Thu
Jn 1:1-18
The Word was in the world and, though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. But to all who accepted him he gave the right to become children of God.

29 Fri
Mt 7:7-11
Jesus said: Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find: knock and the door will be opened to you.

30 Sat
Jn 3:16-17
God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life.

31 SUN
Col 3:12-17
Bear with one another and forgive whatever grievances you have against one another. The Lord has forgiven you, do the same in your turn.

DECEMBER

Although fully present at the heart of human history, especially attentive to the cry of the poor (Exodus 2,23-25; 3,7-10), the God of the Bible cannot be reduced to the realities of this world (Exodus 20,4). Far from allowing himself to be shrunk to fit our human categories, God calls us out of our preconceived notions to lead us towards a Life beyond anything we can imagine. But this pilgrimage towards the unknown, which began with an unexpected act of liberation, awakens apprehension, and so people are constantly tempted to avoid it by creating a god in their own image.

That is what happens to God's people after leaving Egypt. Moses had left to meet God on the mountain and has not yet returned; God remains invisible and seems to be absent. So it is not surprising that the Israelites, beset by fear and insecurity, demand a token of the divine presence that is easy to see and touch, something at their disposition. Aaron agrees to their request and fashions a young bull out of gold.

The very way in which the story is constructed shows how futile such an attempt is. The people want "a god to go before them," in other words a god that shows them the way towards the land of happiness. But it is obvious that a metal statue cannot accomplish this mission. The only way it can walk anywhere is if those who made it carry it on their own shoulders. When human beings try to create a god in their image, this god does not "go" at all. It cannot lead people towards the fullness of life, since it is only a projection of their own fears or hopes. Only by trust in the living God, whose ways are sometimes far different from what we expect, can we leave our closed circles and go towards a new and brighter future.

- What "gods" are we tempted to follow today in our quest for happiness and freedom?
- What enables me to go beyond my fears in order to recognize in my life the presence of the living God and to trust him?
- Have I experienced times when God seemed be absent? What allowed me to begin a new relationship with him?

This section of the Gospel according to Saint Mark is centered on the way of Jesus, which is at the same time the way of his disciples. More than a simple geographical itinerary, the road to Jerusalem becomes a symbol of the life of Christ and of Christians: an existence characterized by the gift of self, a "leaving everything" in order to reach the fullness of life with God. This is context in which the gospel-writer places a significant encounter between Jesus and a wealthy man.

The man is filled with an ardour he can scarcely control that makes him want to go further in his relationship with God. He runs up to Jesus and throws himself down on his knees before asking his burning questions. Jesus tries to channel the fire and begins by reminding the man of the requirements that every member of God's people must follow. When the other insists, Jesus discerns an authentic call in him and invites him to become a disciple. All at once the man's enthusiasm turns into sadness, "because he was very wealthy." This sudden transition from excitement to depression shows that he was counting too much on his own human powers to enter into a communion with God. In fact, our innate desire cannot reach its goal unless something else takes over, another dynamism whose source is not in us: "It is impossible for human beings but not for God; everything is possible for God." The model for a disciple is not the hero able to accomplish superhuman exploits but the little child who knows he must trust others in order to advance (Mark 10,13-16).

The gospels may sometimes seem to speak harshly of our human families. Jesus' intention is never to condemn ordinary human relationships, however, but rather to situate them within a greater and deeper reality. By leaving father and mother on account of Christ and the Gospel (v. 29), the man will truly honour them (v. 19); he will find them once again as part of the universal family of God (v. 30).

- What do the words of Jesus mean for me: "How hard it is for a rich person to enter the Kingdom of God!"?
- How are the promises in vv. 29-30 made concrete in our lives?

Johannine hours are meant as a way of seeking God in silence and prayer in the midst of our daily life. During the course of a day, take an hour or so to read the Bible passage with the short commentary and to reflect on the questions which follow. Afterwards, a group of 3 to 10 people can meet to share what they have discovered and perhaps for a time of prayer.

the young people and need a "real bed", please indicate this when you register.

Families with children, and people with a disability: who need special accommodation should contact Taizé — best by telephone in October or November — to arrange this.

Contribution to costs: The level of contribution for young people from Ireland and Britain will be approximately £40 for the whole meeting (the exact amount will be known in October). For other countries, please contact Taizé. As well as the cost of hiring meeting-halls and equipment, this covers all meals and a public transport pass for each participant.

Travel: Coaches from the UK depart London at 08:00 on 27th December. £115 return, contact "Skyliners", tel: 024 7632 5682; freephone: 0500 481111; email: taizebookings@skyliners.co.uk

Registration for the meeting: with Taizé by 1st December. Further information will be sent in November to those who register earlier.

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London: Meet at the Westminster
prayer (2nd Wednesday of month), contact Mark Holmes, 020 8374 8963

For further contacts in other parts of Britain, write to: meetings@taize.fr

Mozambique

After the Flooding

A German girl spent a year working in Mozambique when flooding ravaged the country. She tells of her experience:

For several months I have been living and working on the small island of Josina in Mozambique. Our organization takes care of the former child-soldiers and other victims of the civil war.

The whole world was able to see images and stories about the flooding that engulfed part of the country and whole towns, causing a great deal of death and destruction. On our island, in the middle of the Incomate River, there is neither electricity nor means of communication, and the floods took us by surprise. We were not able to prepare anything. The worst was for those who were hit at night. They all had to leave their homes and take refuge in the hills. They were not all as lucky as I was, since I was evacuated by helicopter.

On all the hills, refugee camps appeared. People built makeshift dwellings with what they could save from their former homes. I spent several weeks in one of these camps, which offered shelter to seventy thousand people. With religious sisters from different communities, we lived with seventy children and teenagers who had been separated from their families in the chaos of the rescue operations or whose parents were dead. Sleeping in tents, we were in a place of peace, sheltered by large trees, in the center of that immense camp. That experience gave me a lot. Thanks to the

meetings and the regular prayers, I found the strength and the love necessary to accomplish my relief work, distributing food. The people needed to receive material aid, but especially to meet people who would give them time and attention. Recently, in a house of Mother Teresa's sisters, I found a text that touched me because it expressed well the way we try to live: "Whoever we are, rich or poor, healthy or ill, it is not what we do that matters, but the love with which we do it."

In the midst of all this suffering and the problems to solve, the encounters with those who have lost everything, with orphaned children, I have discovered lots of love, joy and light. Many children are now reunited again with their families and the camp is becoming empty. I admire their courage. A few years ago, after the long civil war they had begun to rebuild, and now they have to start from scratch all over again. I would like to share in their hope.

Brazil

The Feast of the Handicapped

For thirty-five years now Taizé brothers have been living in Brazil, sharing the life of the poor. In the city they live in, Alagoinhas, and in the surrounding region, there are many people with different kinds of handicaps, especially the hard-of-hearing. One of the brothers writes:

This is how we celebrated the Day of the Transfiguration this year, August 6: for the 2000th anniversary of Jesus' coming to earth, we invited all the handicapped people in our area to our home so that they could be Jesus' special guests during his birthday celebration. It was the first time we organized a celebration of this size. The idea had been proposed to the religious brothers and sisters of our diocese as a way of celebrating the Jubilee Year. It was accepted, and many other towns joined us. The event was especially important because usually almost nothing is done for the handicapped. Almost all of them live at home, with no access to schools or medical care. Who knows? Perhaps other initiatives will follow this one...

More than a thousand people attended, both handicapped people and those accompanying them. It was a beautiful celebration. The participants came from many towns in the surrounding area; some traveled for as long as four hours to get there. In our city, we were able to organize a special bus service which went to the different districts to collect the participants at fixed points.

The celebration, and especially its preparation, were envisaged as offering a way to live out literally the Gospel of Luke 14,15-23: "Go out into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the

lame...to make sure my house is full." With teenagers preparing for confirmation we held a day of silence, meditating on that text and on another one: "Jesus sent out his disciples two by two to proclaim the Kingdom of God." Preparing this festival was a way of living out directly those two pages from the Gospel. These 14- to 16-year-olds took the text literally and went out to invite the "special guests" of Jesus.

Some brothers of handicapped people from our neighbourhood, who work as "parking boys" in the city centre, were given the task of welcoming the cars, vans and buses in our small street, which is not at all adapted to this kind of welcome: it is full of mud and holes. They did the job like true professionals. At the end, they impressed us by placing the money they earned, though they had not asked for any, at the disposition of all. We met with them for a moment, and together it was not hard to find a use for the small amount.

The main discovery was that the deaf were able to take responsibility for an event of this sort. They took on important material tasks, and ensured most of the presentation during the Mass to make the Gospel reading relevant, involving several "silent songs," two "silent skits," the traditional capoeira and other ritual dances of African origin.

The youth group known as the "club of hands that speak," made up of both the hard-of-hearing and those who lend their hearing abilities, set the tone by presenting a beautiful musical dramatization to greet and acclaim everybody—all the towns, groups and districts present. During the festival, we set up a stand to inform the participants of their rights according to the Constitution of Brazil. And, beyond the external framework, as always the most important thing was what happened in personal encounters, from which everyone received something unique.

During a time of sharing after the festival, one of the poorest of the deaf people, someone who practically lives on the street, told us with much inner joy how he had spent the day taking care of physically handicapped persons. It was a big step forward for him. The children, the deaf, young people who are often very difficult, gave the best of themselves and were very happy about it. In the midst of the activity, they all made a great effort and were able to forget things that normally cause them to suffer; that is what they will remember most of all. Many told afterwards how the inner peace and joy of some of the handicapped had touched them.

For the "guests of Jesus," it was a celebration that brought much rejoicing. Everyone felt happy, especially since, for most of them, it was the first time in their lives they had ever been invited to take part in a celebration.

Letter from Taizé

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